

Optimism, realism for USU

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There's a mix of optimism and realism in the Utah State Aggies camp this fall. Just listen to Coach Chuck Shelton's assesment of the Aggies' offense.

"Our offense is going to be a lot better," he promised, then added in reference to last year's anemic USU offensive output, "But then, is that saying much? Does that mean we get five first-and-10s a game instead of four, and four points instead of three?"

Overall, that about sums up Shelton's view of his Aggies — they'll be a better team than the one that finished 3-8 last season, but whether that will translate into more wins remains to be seen. But a "good" spring practice session has Shelton looking for better things this fall.

As always, there are some solid spots and some thin spots on the roster. Among the solid spots is the all-senior defensive backfield, led by four year starter Darrin Long (brother of BYU safety Troy Long).

"Darrin is one of the finest defensive backs I've ever been associated with. He's an ideal safety — he has great quickness, good instinct for the ball," Shelton said.

Long (6-0, 182) will be joined by returning starters Chad Troxclair (6-3, 194, SS), Tony Brown (5-10, 172, LC) and Pondre Davis (6-0, 177, RC), and together they should give USU a tough pass defense.

Things are just the opposite in the linebacker position, where all three starters graduated, including All-Conference great Al



Chuck Shelton

Smith.

"Linebacker is our biggest question mark on defense," Shelton said. "We have some plans for that position, but it remains to be seen if they materialize. If they don't, we could be in some real trouble."

Leading candidates for starting positions include senior Dennis Wildman (6-2, 216), a non-letterman member of last year's squad who transferred from Dixie College; redshirt freshman Scott Sbranti (5-10, 210), jaycee transfer Donald Miller (6-2, 212), junior letterman Jim Otto (6-2, 220) and jaycee transfer Steve Davis (6-2, 225).

On the defensive line, the Cougars lost big Mark Mraz and Jim Pauciello, but Shelton still thinks the Aggies may be more consistent on the line this season than

last.

"Of course they are big holes to fill, they were great players. But I thought we were a little inconsistent defensively last season, and I hope we can become more consistent this season," he said.

That job of consistency will fall to returning starters Brian Hunsaker (6-6, 250, jr.) who will move from nose guard to left tackle this fall and senior Gary Hulsey (6-6, 285) at right tackle, plus lettermen Todd Thornton (6-3, 226, jr.), Jeff Hunsaker (6-5, 248, so.), Troy Phillips (6-1, 231, so.) and Mark Kokkola (6-5, 273, fr). Hulsey is coming off a year plagued with knee injuries and is still questionable.

The Aggies already suffered one big loss — both personnel-wise and personally — when freshman defensive lineman Carleton Oates, Jr., collapsed and died after practice early in the fall.

On offense, the Aggies "cleaned house" at quarterback and brought in three new faces to compete for the job — all three jaycee transfers. The three are Brent Snyder (6-4, 214, Diablo, CA, jaycee), Russ Widerburg (6-1, 185, Ventura jaycee) and Eric Chaudron (6-5, 212, Merced jaycee). All three participated in spring drills but Shelton said no decision has been made yet as to the starter.

"I feel good about our jaycee quarterbacks. We let them all come in and try during the spring, now we'll see what happens in fall practice. I know we're way ahead of where we

(See UTAH ST., Page 18A)